

printing of export documentation) can also be met automatically in response to this WH Request type.

[051] In accordance with the WH Request or Transfer Order, employees of WM 108 will then update the stock by moving or treating the product, step 415.

[052] In addition, as shown in FIG. 4, the decision code may also trigger updates for other records utilized by the management system(s) including, but not limited to, an inbound-delivery, step 417, of the LES 110. As previously noted, other processing activities may be defined according to the requirements of the supplier, consistent with the present invention. One of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that as these additional/modified activities are required, additional decision codes may be created (or modified) to trigger these activities in CRM 104, WM 108, LES 110, and/or other management systems. Other exemplary records which may be utilized by management system(s) in accordance with the present invention are further described

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[053] By way of example, in one embodiment, following an inspection that leads to the result "remanufacture," a warehouse employee or inspector need only capture the appropriate disposition or decision code, such as "Reman." Capturing this disposition code would automatically:

- trigger all system activities in the warehouse to transfer the material to a re-manufacturing facility (i.e., a particular Follow-up Activity);
- send the CRM Notification "accepted" to the CRM system. The CRM can issue credit or not, based on its relationship with customer 101;

[037] FIG. 4 is a flowchart depicting another exemplary method 400 for processing product returns, consistent with the present invention. As shown in FIG. 4, method 400 begins with receipt of the product return, step 401. In one embodiment, the customer may provide a receiving document (or "delivery note"), with the product return. The receiving document (delivery note) may contain such key-data as a return authorization number, a material number, a batch number, and/or a serial number to allow proper matching of the product return with the record(s) utilized by the management system(s), such as, but not limited to a Warehouse-Request (WH Request) in WM 108.

[038] A WH Request is a data structure, record, or file (such as an information object in a R/3 system) created by WM 108, which may be used for managing and tracking product returns at the warehouse level. In one embodiment, each WH Request may contain information concerning the delivery of a product return from a customer. Such information may include, but is not limited to, the type of product being returned, the quantity of items to be returned from the customer, a return code, and a unique identifier or RAN associated with the product return. Exemplary embodiments related to the creation and use of a WH Request, including the RAN, are further

described in U.S. Patent Application No. [Attorney Docket No. 08020.0013].

[039] Once the returned materials arrive at the warehouse, step 401, WM 108 may issue a transfer order, step 403, to transfer the returned items from, for example, delivery area 202 to return area 203 (see FIG. 2). A transfer order (or "TO") is an instruction to move materials from a source location (such as a source storage bin) to a destination location (such as a destination storage bin) within a warehouse complex,

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entitled "Systems and Methods for Managing Product Returns using Return Authorization Numbers," the contents of which are expressly incorporated by reference herein, may be implemented as part of step 303 to initiate and manage a product return. In such embodiments, the approval and management of the product return may utilize a unique identifier, such as a Return Authorization Number (RAN). As disclosed in U.S. Patent Application No. [Attorney Docket No. 08020.0013],  
10/787,205 the unique identifier may serve as a control instrument for handling the product return and passing information between different management systems, such as CRM 104 and WM 108 of supplier 102. In accordance with this approach, only approved returns may be initiated and managed by CRM 104 and WM 108.

[034] Referring again to FIG. 3, customer 101 may return the product(s) to supplier 102, such as by mailing or shipping it to warehouse 201, step 303. Upon receipt of the product return by warehouse 201, the product is unloaded and stored in an area of warehouse 201, such as return area 203, step 305. Thereafter, the product return may be inspected, step 307, with the results of the inspection being captured in one or more management system(s), step 309. To capture the inspection results, records may be created and stored in each of the management system(s). Based upon the results of the inspection captured in the management system(s), employees of warehouse 201 and/or supplier 102 may conduct the appropriate activities, step 311. Examples of activities are further disclosed below and with reference to, for example, FIG. 4.